

Solutions for York Employer... continued

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a Petro employee served as the job coach, collaborating with Voc Rehab. “It was an excellent experience,” said Gerri.

Petro of York was recently acknowledged for its practice of employing people with disabilities, receiving a Business Excellence Award from Voc Rehab.

She said in the summer, when the travel industry picks up, Petro will be doing more hiring. “We will just put anybody on that we possibly can,” she said.

Gerri noted that she and her husband would be leaving Petro due to an ownership change. But, she said, all of

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— Danielle Redman
Employment Specialist

the managers know Voc Rehab’s number now. “They’ve had an excellent experience with them,” she said. “Hopefully... the relationship will continue.”

“Gerri supplied good work experiences and provided a positive work environment,” said Danielle. “She encouraged open communication. She was always accommodating and promoted growth for every individual she hired.”

Gerri predicted Petro would keep collaborating with Vocational Rehabilitation.

“It’s really a win-win situation,” she said. □

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Solutions for York Employer

Positive results for Petro Plaza

Human resource manager Gerri McIntyre had a challenging task: finding reliable staff in a tight labor market for the top-rated Petro franchise in the nation. Located at the crossroads of I-80 and US Highway 81 in York, the thriving travel plaza is open 24 hours a day. To keep it going, Gerri tapped a new source for employees last year: Vocational Rehabilitation (Voc Rehab). The results have been positive for all involved.

“We’ve been able to gain employees in a very tight labor market... (and) they’ve been able to gain jobs,” said Gerri. Vocational Rehabilitation has enabled the business to tap into personnel resources that were never available before.

Petro offers benefits, an added plus for Voc Rehab clients. Gerri said the business was glad to adapt the workplace as necessary and would love to hire anyone they could accommodate.

Staff from Voc Rehab did a total walk-through of the plaza to see what the jobs actually involved. Then they were able to fit the right client to the right opening, providing Gerri with a kind of pre-screening that aided the hiring process.

Gerri was pleased with the applicants sent to her by Voc Rehab’s Employment Specialist, Danielle Redman. “The people that come from Voc Rehab already know what it takes to do a good job,” she said. “They come ready to work hard.”

Gerri said that Voc Rehab applicants aren’t like others who apply in several places and don’t care if they’re hired. Voc Rehab applicants really want to be at Petro. She praised Danielle’s knowledge of their operations and her ability to send candidates who are a good fit for the business. “Danielle’s just bent over backwards to meet all of our needs. She’s just great,” said Gerri.

Gerri found working with Voc Rehab positive in other ways, because Voc Rehab supports both the employee and the employer by coaching the new employee and encouraging the employee to ask for help with any issues that arise.

Petro has had two Voc Rehab placements so far. The first person was a custodian, who has moved on to another position.

The other placement is an ongoing success story. The client was hired as a dishwasher and has done a phenomenal job, according to Gerri. This time



Gerri McIntyre

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situation.”

Right on Target

Gering man finds dream job

Tim Nepper had a job he loved. But he wanted to increase his hours, obtain benefits, and try another job he thought he would like. He turned to the Scottsbluff Vocational Rehabilitation (Voc Rehab) office for help.

Tim, who has severe bilateral hearing loss, had worked with Voc Rehab during high school and while attending community college. He got a supervisory position in the kitchen at Gilli's Fill'n Station in Gering, but kept in contact with Voc Rehab through their Employment Warranty (EW) Monitoring Program.

In May 2004, Tim decided to take advantage of Employment Warranty services to increase his income and occupational experience.

"(Tim) didn't want to leave Gilli's," explained Voc Rehab's Byron Barkeloo. "He wanted actually to work two jobs.

We were a little concerned that he was going to be overworking himself... But when Tim gets his mind set, you kind of have to go with the flow." Byron knew Tim was a hard worker and tenacious self-starter.

Tim wanted work in retail stocking, warehouse, or shipping and receiving. He was paired with Employment Specialist Pat Kraemer, who approached local retail stores. Target in Scottsbluff was very interested.

Pat assisted Tim with the first Target interview and two follow up interviews. They discussed personal appearance, interview clothes, transferable skills, work history, and drug test procedures; providing his resume and addressing his hearing impairment with interviewers; and role-playing job interviews. She helped Tim with greeting employees and reliable transportation.

"Tim had resisted wearing his hearing aids at school or work because of people making fun," noted Kraemer. "Consequently, Tim refused to wear his hearing aids for a job interview. With lots of encouragement from me, Tim agreed to wear both hearing

"Tim tells people

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— Pat Kraemer



Tim Nepper

aids to his third job interview at Target with Delana Legler."

Tim got the job.

A condition of employment, Tim agreed to wear the hearing aids to improve his communication skills. Pat acted as an interpreter at the interviews and orientation, writing questions for Tim, who wrote his responses. During orientation, Pat helped Tim complete personnel forms and review the Target handbook.

Pat maintains contact with Target employees. Management and staff praise Tim's outgoing personality and big smile. "We refer to (it) as the Million Dollar Smile," Pat said.

"(Tim) has just blended in with our team," said Delana. "He gets along really well with his peers and his peers look up to him." Tim stocks, unloads trucks, builds displays, helps customers find items, and does carry-

out. He likes working with people. He gets an employee discount and will soon be eligible for benefits.

Tim works 35 hours a week at Target and 20 hours a week at Gilli's, taking additional hours when asked. "He's a very ambitious man," said Pat.

Pat said she has seen Tim blossom in many ways. "When Tim came to Voc Rehab he was shy, passive, spoke very little, had hearing and speech problems, essentially no work history, no direction in life, and needed someone to advocate for him," said Pat. Now, Tim is outgoing and enthusiastic. His hearing and speech have improved since he began wearing both hearing aids.

"Tim is very proud to wear the Target uniform and tells people he is a crew member at Target...his dream job!" said Pat.

Tim said Vocational Rehabilitation was very helpful to him in getting the Target position. He isn't planning to add any more jobs.

"I'm staying where I'm at for now," he said. □

Attitude is everything

Finding Supports in Kearney

Lawrence Giffin was born with a developmental disability; this never stopped him from finding work. His problem was keeping it.

Lawrence remembers his first job at the Dew Drop Inn and Cafe. His next job was at a cheese plant. Then he worked at a fast food franchise. "The list goes on and on," he said. He would get a job, quit in two to four weeks, and then find another job.

At various points after graduating high school in 1989, Lawrence had worked with Vocational Rehabilitation (Voc Rehab).

In June 2002, he was experiencing depression and returned to Voc Rehab for help. At that time, he felt he had problems with everything. Math had always been difficult and his reading skills were "touch and go," he said.

Lawrence said he went to Voc Rehab to learn how to communicate with his bosses. He was teamed with Cindy Powell, Employment Specialist from the Kearney Vocational Rehabilitation office.

At Voc Rehab, Lawrence underwent testing, including assessment of his motor skills and reading ability. He received career counseling, independent living, job placement and job retention services.

He was placed in jobs, but continued his old pattern. "Lawrence has always been able to get a job and actually can perform the skills required," said Cindy. But, she said, he was impulsive and inclined to leave.

In March 2003 Cindy referred Lawrence to Goodwill Industries of Greater Nebraska for job coaching and job support services. "If it wasn't (for) Goodwill and (for) Voc Rehab trying to help me," he said, "I'd be totally lost."

With the combined assistance, Lawrence searched for employment and got guidance in matching his skills to the job openings. As his job search progressed, Lawrence changed his attitude. Lawrence said he

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Lawrence Giffin

used to think he needed to "know it all," but he learned that he didn't. "(I) told myself that if I ever got me another job I was going to stick with it through thick and thin," he said. "I didn't care what it was... I just changed my whole life."

The polite, respectful treatment he received at Voc Rehab and at Goodwill inspired Lawrence to become more polite himself. "You were getting the respect that you wanted," he explained. "I never had that before."

In August 2003, Lawrence was hired by Red Lobster. He was determined he would keep the job. Goodwill provided Lawrence with a job coach and job support services.

Lawrence is still with Red Lobster, doing work he loves. "This is the best job I could ever ask for," he said. "I come in there with a good attitude every morning... It's the first job I ever liked."

Lawrence said his family has noticed the change in his attitude and is very proud of him for his dedication to keeping this job.

In April 2004, he received an award and was recognized as Consumer of the Year by Goodwill. He also achieved his goal of independence with the move from his grandmother's home to a subsidized Emerson Place apartment.

"Lawrence is a very likeable person and has endless energy," said Cindy. "He is a valued asset to his employer."

"I kept my attitude and kept going," said Lawrence. □